

# Longtime members recall church's start

## 4 denominations shared first building

By BONNIE SEAL  
Correspondent, The Oregonian

CAMAS — Seventy-four years have passed since Hazel Olds first set foot in Camas, then called LaCamas.

That was in 1912, the year Olds, as a 12-year-old, began attending St. John's Presbyterian Church, then "just a small wooden church down the hill" from the current church building at Northeast Birch and 12th streets, she said.

Olds is one of 10 persons who have been members of the St. John's congregation for more than 60 years and are being honored this year as part of the congregation's centennial celebration.

"The church is the oldest religious congregation in Camas," said Milton Bona, historian and public relations director for the church. The church held its first service Dec. 9, 1883, he said.

To commemorate the year, the church has planned a series of events that began Sunday with ceremonies honoring long-term members. Other events include a potluck dinner in June and services Dec. 4 and 11.

In addition, Bona has written an 80-page history of the church, including 30 black-and-white photographs and a color picture of the church on the cover.

Aeneas McMaster, a Scottish immigrant who had been an elder in the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, was the first member of the congregation. To start the church, he wrote to the Presbytery of Puget Sound and asked for a minister to establish a Presbyterian church in LaCamas.

As a result, a representative of the presbytery conducted the first Presbyterian service in LaCamas in a warehouse, several months after the town was platted.

Afterward, services were held in the storeroom of the 14-by-20-foot general store owned by McMaster, until the first church on Division Street was built in 1886.

For a number of years, this was the only church in LaCamas, and it was shared by four religious denominations — Methodists, Baptists, Evangelicals, and Presbyterians.

"Each Sunday a different religious service was held in the church, and the entire congregation attended," Bona said.

The current building at 1206 N.E. Birch St. was completed in 1943 and expanded in 1958.

Marjorie Blake, another long-term member, is the granddaughter of McMaster. She was born in LaCamas in 1900 and said she has "always been involved in the church."

Since the church was established, its congregation has taken an active role in community affairs, Bona said.

Both the first Camp Fire and Boy Scout groups in Camas were started at St. John's in 1914, four years after the organizations were launched on the national level.

The church sponsored the town's first refugee family in 1961, Bona said.

Other members recognized for more than 60 years of participation are Irene Roffler, Hugh Gittings, Ella



HONOREES — Marjorie Blake (left) and Hazel Olds are among nine members of St. John's Presbyterian Church being honored as part of centen-

nial celebration. Olds has been a church member for 74 years. Blake is granddaughter of Aeneas McMaster, church's first member.

Mae Duffin, George Stoller, Helen Craig, Anna Mettler and May Ulowetz, all of Camas, and Elizabeth Currie, of Duarte, Calif.

The current church is of a modern Gothic architecture, designed by Glen Smith, a draftsman at Camas paper mill.

Hazel Olds lived to be 100 yrs. of age